

Senate Chamber, Atlanta, Georgia
Wednesday, January 12, 2005
Third Legislative Day

The Senate met pursuant to adjournment at 10:00 a.m. today and was called to order by the President.

Senator Thomas of the 54th reported that the Journal of the previous legislative day had been read and found to be correct.

By unanimous consent, the reading of the Journal was dispensed with.

The Journal was confirmed.

The following Senate legislation was introduced, read the first time and referred to committee:

SB 10. By Senators Meyer von Bremen of the 12th, Tate of the 38th, Brown of the 26th, Golden of the 8th, Stoner of the 6th and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Chapter 5 of Title 21 and Titles 42 and 45 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating, respectively, to ethics in government; penal institutions; and public officers, so as to provide for the comprehensive revision of provisions regarding ethics and conflicts of interest; to provide for a short title; to provide for and change certain definitions; to provide for the timely issuance of advisory opinions by the State Ethics Commission and other matters relative to advisory opinions; to create certain restrictions on receipt or award of state contracts; to change provisions relating to acceptance of contributions during legislative sessions; to change certain provisions relating to filing of financial disclosure statements; to provide for an effective date and applicability; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Ethics Committee.

SB 22. By Senators Seabaugh of the 28th, Smith of the 52nd, Hill of the 32nd and Williams of the 19th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Title 33 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to insurance, so as to change certain provisions relating to medical malpractice insurance rate filings; to change certain provisions relating to rate increases for medical malpractice insurance; to provide for approval or rejection of such rate increases; to provide for certain hearings in connection

with such rate increase approvals; to provide for certain notices and reports; to provide for related matters; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes

Referred to the Insurance and Labor Committee.

SB 25. By Senators Seabaugh of the 28th, Harp of the 29th, Schaefer of the 50th, Hill of the 32nd, Pearson of the 51st and others:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Chapter 5 of Title 19 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to divorce, so as to require certain divorcing parents to participate in education classes that focus on the effect of divorce and separation on children; to provide for legislative findings; to provide for the types of persons who can provide the education; to provide for exceptions to the education classes; to change the time limit for granting a divorce on the grounds that the marriage is irretrievably broken; to provide for different time frames for granting divorce based on certain circumstances; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Judiciary Committee.

SB 26. By Senators Cagle of the 49th, Bulloch of the 11th, Stephens of the 27th and Pearson of the 51st:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 41-1-7 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to treatment of agricultural facilities and operations and forest land as nuisances, so as to provide for legislative declarations; to define a term; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee.

SB 27. By Senator Henson of the 41st:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Chapter 2 of Title 40 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to registration and licensing of motor vehicles, so as to provide for registration of private military vehicles; to provide that the commissioner of motor vehicle safety shall implement rules and regulations relating to the registration of private military vehicles; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee.

SB 28. By Senator Henson of the 41st:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Chapter 5 of Title 40 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to drivers' licenses, so as to change certain definitions relating to commercial drivers' licenses; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee.

SB 29. By Senators Cagle of the 49th, Hudgens of the 47th and Thomas of the 54th:

A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to health, so as to require physicians to provide certain information to patients prior to initiating prostate cancer treatment; to provide requirements for a written summary of medically efficacious and viable treatment options for prostate cancer; to provide for statutory construction; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

Referred to the Health and Human Services Committee.

Senator Brown of the 26th asked unanimous consent that Senator Thompson of the 33rd be excused. The consent was granted, and Senator Thompson was excused.

The roll was called and the following Senators answered to their names:

Adelman	Hill,Judson	Starr
Brown	Hooks	Staton
Bulloch	Hudgens	Stephens
Butler	Johnson	Stoner
Cagle	Jones	Tate
Carter	Kemp	Thomas,D
Chance	Me V Bremen	Thomas,R
Chapman	Miles	Thompson,C
Douglas	Moody	Tolleson
Fort	Mullis	Unterman
Goggans	Pearson	Walker
Golden	Powell	Weber
Grant	Rogers	Whitehead
Harbison	Seabaugh	Wiles
Harp	Seay	Williams
Heath	Smith	Zamarripa
Henson		

Not answering were Senators:

Balfour	Hamrick	Hill, Jack
Reed	Schaefer, N	Shafer, D
Thompson, S (Excused)		

The following members were off the floor of the Senate when the roll was called and wish to be recorded as present:

Senators:	Reed	Schaefer	Shafer
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The members pledged allegiance to the flag.

Senator Stephens of the 27th introduced the chaplain of the day, Dr. Richard Lee of Cumming, Georgia, who offered scripture reading and prayer.

Senator Staton of the 18th introduced the doctor of the day, Dr. Dan Callahan.

The following resolutions were read and adopted:

SR 15. By Senators Shafer of the 48th and Whitehead, Sr. of the 24th:

A RESOLUTION commending Honorable Randy Hall; and for other purposes.

SR 16. By Senator Shafer of the 48th:

A RESOLUTION celebrating the birth of Michael Reagan Schoenberg and Jonathan Spencer Schoenberg; and for other purposes.

SR 17. By Senator Shafer of the 48th:

A RESOLUTION celebrating the birth of Evan Walker Graham; and for other purposes.

SR 18. By Senators Seay of the 34th and Chance of the 16th:

A RESOLUTION honoring and congratulating Flat Rock AME Church; and for other purposes.

SR 20. By Senator Miles of the 43rd:

A RESOLUTION recognizing and commending Dr. Sadie Turner McCalep; and for other purposes.

SR 19. By Senators Johnson of the 1st, Stephens of the 27th, Brown of the 26th and Balfour of the 9th:

A RESOLUTION

Relative to adjournment; and for other purposes.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA that the General Assembly shall adjourn at the close of the legislative day on Wednesday, January 12, 2005, and shall reconvene on Monday, January 24, 2005.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that for the duration of the remainder of the 2005 session of the General Assembly until its adjournment sine die, unless otherwise provided by resolution of the General Assembly, the General Assembly shall adjourn at 5:00 P.M. on each Friday on which the General Assembly is in session and shall reconvene on the Monday next following.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, as authorized by Code Section 28-1-2, the hour for convening the Senate on each such Monday may be as ordered by the Senate; and the hour for convening the House on each such Monday may be as ordered by the House.

The following message was received from the House through Mr. Rivers, the Clerk thereof:

Mr. President:

The House has adopted by the requisite constitutional majority the following Resolution of the Senate:

SR 19. By Senators Johnson of the 1st, Stephens of the 27th, Brown of the 26th and Balfour of the 9th:

A RESOLUTION relative to adjournment; and for other purposes.

The following communication was received by the Secretary:

Senator Steve Thompson
District 33
121-F State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Committees:
Appropriations
Banking and Financial Institutions
Finance
Transportation

The State Senate
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

January 12, 2005

To: Frank Eldridge, Sec. of Senate

From: Senator Steve Thompson

RE: Attendance

Sen. Thompson was not able to attend the Session this morning, and was excused. He did however return to the Capitol later in the day.

Senator Stephens of the 27th moved that upon the dissolution of the Joint Session the Senate stand adjourned pursuant to SR 19 until 1:00 p.m. Monday, January 24, 2005 and the President announced the motion prevailed at 10:39 a.m.

The hour for convening the Joint Session of the Senate and House having arrived, the President, accompanied by the Secretary and Senators, proceeded to the Hall of the House of Representatives, and the Joint Session, called for the purpose of hearing a message by His Excellency, Governor Sonny Perdue, was called to order by the Speaker of the House. SR 13, authorizing the Joint Session of the Senate and House, was read by the Clerk of the House.

His Excellency, Governor Sonny Perdue, addressed the Joint Session of the Senate and the House of Representatives as follows:

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, President Pro Tem Johnson, Speaker Pro Tem Burkhalter and members of the General Assembly...

My fellow constitutional officers...Justices of the Supreme Court and Judges of the Court of Appeals...members of the Consular Corps ...

Other distinguished guests and my fellow Georgians -- as I come before you to once again report on the state of our State, I see many new faces here tonight.

I welcome you all. You've arrived in a season of new hope and you bring with you a fresh wind of change. I look forward to working side by side with each of you to build the New Georgia.

I first spoke of the New Georgia during my campaign for the office I now hold. I described it as a fresh approach to governing our state.

What does it really mean?

Having a government that is principle-centered -- that means being good stewards.

People-focused -- that means doing what makes a difference in people's every day lives.

And customer-driven -- that means realizing Georgians are not only our constituents, they are our customers.

We've weathered some storms on this journey. As we pulled up anchor two years ago, the storms were on the horizon and the thunder and lightning loomed over us.

Perhaps our biggest challenge was dealing with the effects of a national recession. The downturn brought two years in a row of declining state revenues while the demand for state services in health care, education and other areas was greater than ever.

In the business world, lower profits reflect less demand for your product. But in government the opposite is true -- demand for our services increases in hard times.

But Georgians pulled together, and Georgia pulled through. We worked closely together to balance the budget while meeting the real human needs of our citizens. It wasn't easy. It required some tough decisions. As you'll remember, I told you we had to choose between the good and the also good.

But we got the job done by setting priorities and aligning our spending with our core values as a state.

Today I'm happy to report, the skies are clearing. When I ran for this office, I told you the forecast was sunny. I just didn't tell you when. We're finally moving into economic recovery, adding more than 39,000 jobs in the last twelve months.

And with fresh economic growth, our state tax revenues have improved too. We're now able to add about \$40 million to our revenue estimate for this year. And we're projecting growth of just over 6% for next year.

That's good news for Georgia. We're in better shape as a state. That means we'll be able to take care of some of those "also good" programs we talked about.

And now, having passed through the storm, it is time to take our bearings and chart our course anew.

Tonight, I want to share with you what I believe that course should be. I want to issue a call to Georgians -- a challenge, really -- not to be satisfied with "good."

I believe Georgia should aspire to nothing less than greatness. And I believe greatness is within our grasp.

But the path to reaching it may surprise you. It is not a path of growing government. It is not a path of more programs, more spending and more rules and regulations. No, our greatness does not come from our government.

It comes from nearly 9 million people who call Georgia home. Between us, we have the enterprise, the character and the capacity to achieve just about anything.

We can nurture our children and give them an outstanding education that will help them achieve their dreams.

We can perform great works of compassion to help those in need and strengthen our families which leads to better communities and thus a great state.

I believe we can build a state of opportunity that excels at innovation. Where businesses thrive, good jobs are plentiful, and hard work is rewarded.

A state that values our families, honors our faith and cherishes our freedoms.

These are goals worthy of Georgia. And, yes, government has a role in helping us reach our goals -- but as a partner, a co-laborer, not as a boss.

The starring role belongs to We The People -- the citizens of Georgia who are the true strength of our state.

So just how do we go about pursuing greatness as a state? I believe the first step is to fundamentally change how we think about government's role in our lives.

You see, I believe most people want just a few basic things from government.

They want safe neighborhoods, good schools, good roads and the opportunity for good jobs to support their families. They want a safety net in place for the hard times.

Beyond that, they just want government to leave them alone.

We don't want a busybody government -- a boss -- that butts into our lives every chance it gets to tell us how to work, how to play, where to live and on and on.

And we don't want to perpetuate an entitlement mentality that causes people to expect more and more from the government and less and less of themselves.

I think our government motto should be like that of a great Georgia company, The Home Depot -- "You can do it, we can help."

So, if we want great things to happen...if we want that safe, healthy, educated and growing Georgia we dream of, we should make two simple requests of our state government.

First, to perform its basic functions effectively -- that's doing the right things. Efficiently -- doing them well. And ethically -- doing them fairly.

After that, we should be smart enough to get out of the way and let the people do what they do best.

These principles are the foundation of the New Georgia and they are deeply embedded in the legislative and budget agenda I will share with you tonight, beginning with our top priority -- Georgia's children.

We're putting their needs first -- their education, their health and their future.

That's why we'll invest more than half of the state budget in education.

And because of the importance of the job they do, my budget includes a 2% pay raise for our school teachers.

We know that our teachers work hard. If we all spent more time in the classroom with them I know that you, like me, would want to pay them all like Michael Vick.

At an event last week, a little girl in the 4th grade came up to me and said she had a message from her teachers. They knew she was coming to see me and wanted her to say, from them, "Thank you for our raises." I appreciate that. But they really have it backwards -- Teachers, thank you for all you do.

Keeping good teachers in the classroom is one of the most important things we can do for our children's education. That's why my 2005 education package will include a Master Teacher program.

Our best teachers do more than impart facts and figures -- they inspire and encourage students and instill a true desire to learn. That's a fine art in itself. We want to recognize teachers who have mastered this skill and help them serve as Academic Coaches and role models to their peers. The Master Teacher program will help Georgia's All-Star teachers share their classroom skills.

And to give our youngest students the bright start they deserve, my budget includes funding to add almost 2000 new students to Georgia's Pre-Kindergarten program this year and 4000 new students next year.

At the other end of the K-12 system is a proposal I'm very excited about -- the Georgia Virtual High School. Let me tell you how this idea came about.

At one of a series of education listening sessions I held, I met a high school student from Clinch County named Cliff Tippens. He said he was a good student and he wanted to take the most challenging classes to prepare for college. But because of where he lived, he did not have access to many AP or advanced math or science courses. And he was not the only one in that situation.

Now this just didn't make sense to me. In the 21st Century, mere geography shouldn't prevent our brightest students from doing their very best work.

Well, we're going to fix that. The Georgia Virtual High School will give students everywhere in Georgia access to over 60 online courses that will be ready to go by this summer, including over 15 AP courses and SAT prep.

This year, Cliff is a freshman at the University of Georgia, and state president of the Georgia FFA. Ladies and gentlemen, Cliff is one of the reasons I value Ag education and why we're fully funding it.

Cliff is here with us tonight in the gallery, along with his mother, Beverly, a teacher at Burke County High School. I want to recognize them both and thank Cliff for speaking up and making a difference.

Soon our students will get another powerful tool to help them with the entire process of getting ready for college. It's called GACollege411.

This website will provide students, parents and counselors the tools they need to stay on track for college. Using GACollege411, students will be able to research Georgia colleges and careers, prepare for the SAT, apply for admission, submit transcripts and apply for financial aid -- all online.

These are some of the highlights of my education package. But I want to speak for a moment about some of the other needs of children. As I have said here before, Mary and I believe that we all have a moral obligation to protect and to nurture Georgia's children.

We must do all in our power to shield children from abuse and neglect. And that applies especially to children in state custody, who rely on us to be their champions and defenders.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to tell you that Georgia's children have no better champion than my lifelong partner and the love of my life, Mary Perdue.

She has worked long and hard to organize the First Lady's Our Children Campaign,

encouraging Georgians to address the needs of abused and neglected children within their communities. She has led two statewide Summits on our Children to raise public awareness of children's issues. And she is leading a Children's Cabinet to better coordinate state and private efforts to stem abuse and neglect, promote foster care and adoption, and serve other needs of children.

Mary, I want you to know how proud I am of you. You are making a difference in the lives of Georgia's children.

And it is her heart and her hard work that have inspired me to put our money where our mouth is. We're going to begin hiring and training 500 new child protective service workers to reduce the caseload in DFACS. A reduced caseload will enable our workers to better serve Georgia families and better protect Georgia's children.

We want every child to have an opportunity to grow up safe, healthy and well-educated. And when they enter the workforce, we want them to find good, high-paying jobs with a future right here in Georgia.

That's why my administration has devoted our time and effort to growing jobs for Georgia families. Our state continues to attract world class companies, both homegrown and from elsewhere. And we're proud to have them here.

We're pursuing a long-term strategy to encourage entrepreneurship and small business growth, support existing industries, and invest in the high-paying strategic industries of the future.

As a Middle Georgia business owner, I know that small business contributes most of the job growth in rural Georgia. Small business entrepreneurs create opportunity in every part of the state.

That's why I will introduce the Entrepreneur and Small Business Growth Initiative, essentially putting booster rockets on small business growth in Georgia by providing a tax exemption for Georgia small businesses.

Additionally, we're going to reduce the unintended consequences of state regulations on small business. Survival is tough enough without the government coming along to poke a stick in your eye with costly, poorly considered -- and can I say dumb -- regulations.

We'll also launch a Tourism Growth Initiative to boost one of Georgia's biggest industries. Georgia has a great story to tell. It's the Soul of the South with hometowns, heritage and hospitality that draw visitors from around the world.

Simply put, we're going to do a better job of telling our story so we can share Georgia's hospitality with the world.

The third component of my job growth package is the Strategic Industries and Innovation Initiative. You all know that growing jobs for Georgians has been one of my top priorities. That's why we're going to give a \$500 per job tax credit for companies already in Georgia who are growing jobs.

While making Georgia that state of opportunity I mentioned earlier, we will not forget those for whom the American Dream is temporarily out of reach. Georgians are a compassionate people who will take care of our neighbors when they can't take care of themselves.

That safety net is important, but we want to make it more like a trampoline that will catch those who fall and then launch them back to new heights.

One way we can do that is by empowering the families and the churches and the community organizations who are closest to those in need. That is why I will again ask the General Assembly to pass my Faith and Family Services Amendment.

Faith-based service organizations deserve the same opportunity to serve citizens that everyone else has.

I'll give you a great example. Last week I visited the Albany Outreach Center, which was established by six churches to assist those in need. Over the past 16 years, this group has helped over 40,000 individuals with food and financial assistance through its Emergency Aid Office. And their Alzheimer's daycare center has assisted hundreds of families by giving home care givers of loved ones with Alzheimer's some free time from their responsibilities.

Folks, let's fix the part of our constitution that outlaws support for the kind of work these good people do.

And just as we should have choices in providing social services, we should give Georgians more options and more control over their own health care and retirement.

The principles of consumer choice and personal responsibility are critical to building a healthier Georgia. And at some point, we will all face the responsibilities of caring for aging parents and planning for our own retirement.

So, through our Healthy Choices Initiative, we'll conduct an outreach and education campaign to help Georgians improve their diet, exercise and lifestyle.

We will also launch a "get ready for retirement" awareness campaign so families can plan

ahead for the future medical needs of aging parents. And we'll help family caregivers support their aging parents at home.

We all want more control over our own health care. One powerful way to get it is by opening a Health Savings Account. These accounts allow tax-free savings that can be used to pay for annual health care needs. That gives Georgians greater incentive to demand good value when they purchase health care services. When you're spending your own money, you're in charge.

We will add a Health Savings Account option to the State Health Benefit Plan, so that more Georgians can start planning, saving for and controlling their own health care.

Those are some of my budget and legislative highlights for education, children, jobs, and personal responsibility.

But as we ask Georgians to take more responsibility for their own lives in the New Georgia, we're also demanding that state government do its work more effectively and more efficiently.

That is why I created the Commission for a New Georgia – a group of accomplished men and women from outside government who have volunteered countless hours to find better, simpler, more efficient ways of doing the people's business.

Bob Hatcher and Joe Rogers are the co-chairs of the Commission. I want to thank them, and all the members of the Commission, for their service. We're now starting to put their good ideas into action.

Some examples --

Did ya'll know we're having an online garage sale? We are now selling surplus state property at online auctions on eBay so we can find more buyers and get the best price. In the first week of the eBay auction, we had 55 bids for a beat-up 40-year-old fire truck and sold it for nearly \$5,000 to a buyer in Percy, California.

There will soon be many more surplus vehicles ready for sale. Two years ago, we didn't even know how many cars the state owned. Today, we're getting an accurate count. We're also tightening our vehicle use policy...and we plan to sell off at least 2000 excess vehicles by June 30.

We're applying the same principles to the state's real property, both owned and leased. Would you buy stock in a company that didn't know what property it owned? I wouldn't and I wouldn't expect you to either.

So I've appointed Georgia's first State Property Officer to catalog all the land and buildings the state owns, sell what we don't need, and manage the rest more cost effectively. Like many of you do in your own businesses, we'll consolidate leases and we'll put the money we save back to work for the people.

I appreciate the work of our Commission for a New Georgia members in developing these recommendations. I'm just as proud of how their ideas are being implemented throughout state government.

My philosophy of leadership is to surround myself with good people who have ability, judgment and knowledge, but above all, a passion for service.

My Director of Implementation, Lonice Barrett, is a classic example of this model. So are the members of his implementation team and our state agency heads who have embraced the New Georgia. These folks are not afraid of change. If there is a better way to do things, not only do they want to know about it -- they want to get it done yesterday. I'd like to thank all of these leaders here tonight for their outstanding service to the people of Georgia.

We share a commitment to bringing the highest level of customer service to every interaction that Georgians have with their government.

And when we don't get it right, we'll stay at it. Getting or renewing a driver's license is probably the one thing government does that both touches and aggravates just about everyone. If we didn't have a monopoly on this business we'd be out of business.

So we're going to stop acting like a monopoly and start serving customers. We're going to start by hiring more license examiners and making the DMVS an agency with a single laser-like focus -- getting Georgia drivers their licenses quickly, efficiently, and courteously.

Changing the culture of state government is not an overnight process. It requires a constant commitment and a willingness to keep at it until you get it right. We've come a long way in two years, but we've still got a long way to go.

Some may feel tempted to turn back. Back to the old ways of growing government and reaching ever deeper into the taxpayers' pockets.

But I'm here to tell you tonight, we're not going back.

The story is told that long ago, a brave band of explorers crossed the sea to reach the shores of a distant land. They intended to explore this land, and settle it and create new lives here. But they knew there would be many difficult challenges ahead, much hard work, and much uncertainty.

One of the men looked back at the ships they had just left, and then another, and then another. They exchanged sheepish glances and they knew they were all thinking the same thing.

Those ships could take them back. Back to their old, familiar way of life. If building a new life got to be too hard, they could give it all up and go back. But without total commitment, their venture would fail.

They knew then what they had to do. They burned the ships.

Now their only option was to succeed. That's where we are in the New Georgia. We stand on the shore of a great undertaking. And Members of the General Assembly, what I'm asking you to do tonight is join with me and burn the ships!

There is no going back to the old way of doing business. We must go forward -- and, for Georgia's sake, we must succeed.

I view the General Assembly as a strong and essential partner in changing Georgia's relationship with government.

As we go forward, I'll rely on you to pass legislation that makes our state government a more constructive partner for the citizens of Georgia, and less of an obstacle to our dreams.

Which reminds me. There is one more bill I want to mention. I have introduced a version in each of the last two years, only to see it stall. But this year, I fully expect a strong ethics bill to reach my desk by the end of the session. The people of Georgia want it and I think it's time we got it done.

Our intention with ethics legislation is not to play "gotcha!" but simply to set forth the expected standards for all in state government to follow so that we can make Georgians proud.

Another way we can make Georgians proud is to get our business done in a timely manner. I am encouraged that Speaker Richardson and President Pro Tem Johnson have agreed that it should not take 40 days to get the jobs done.

In contrast to the last few years, why don't we try to set a record for the shortest session?

Georgians have always preferred a citizen legislature where men and women take a few weeks from their regular jobs to come and represent their neighbors under the Gold Dome before returning to their communities and their families.

But over the years, an almost permanent Legislature has emerged. It has kept you, our elected representatives, away from your lives and your families for too long each year.

You don't get an opportunity to get an earful of advice from your grocer in Tifton or your barber in Bonaire. And my barber has to talk fast.

And that's a shame. Because I know everyone in this room would agree that we govern better when we spend more time with our neighbors and less time with the crowd that hangs around the Capitol.

To get at their real concerns, there is simply no substitute for talking one-on-one with the people who sent you here.

In the past two years, I've met hundreds of people in my monthly Saturdays with Sonny meetings. I get some of my best ideas from teachers, parents, business owners, farmers...people from all walks of life. Some have suggestions, some have complaints, some just want to say hello.

Among others, I met a foster parent who was having trouble adopting a child.

I can tell you tonight, because we are listening, there is one more foster child in a loving home who for the first time in her life has a permanent family.

My goal is for real customer service to permeate state government. For example, not too long ago Air Force reservist and Atlanta firefighter James Gilbert called a member of my customer service team with a problem. While he was serving on active duty in Iraq he missed a deadline to re-qualify his CPR certification -- by one day. Because of this, he was unable to perform his firefighting duties once he was back stateside.

Now, we have rules and deadlines for a reason. But deadlines are not more important than the people they are meant to protect. We must learn to use common sense as the final arbiter in dealing with the people of our state. My staff was able apply some common sense and find a way to get this firefighter back on the street doing what he loves and is called to do...helping people and saving lives.

James is here as my guest tonight. I want to thank you, sir, for your service to our country and to the people of Georgia.

By the way, James Gilbert will soon be heading back into harm's way, back to Iraq. It will be his third trip there. Many of Georgia's finest and bravest citizens will accompany him.

Just this past Friday, I attended a deployment ceremony at Fort Benning for 4,000

Georgia-based soldiers headed for Iraq and Afghanistan. These devoted servants of our nation represent the best of what America has to offer.

I was proud to stand with them and express the gratitude, the pride, and the support that Georgians feel for these men and women who are part of our Georgia family and who are giving so much to defend our freedom.

Tonight, on behalf of our troops, we are proud to have in the gallery General Dan McNeill, Commanding General, United States Army Forces Command and Specialist James Birdsong, who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom, as a Military Policeman and Dog Handler.

Please join me in thanking General McNeill, Specialist Birdsong and all of our troops who are defending our freedom here and overseas.

I promised those soldiers at Fort Benning that we would take care of their families while they are away and I told them that millions of Georgians would pray for their safety. Tonight I make that request of everyone listening -- please pray for our men and women in uniform as they protect us.

And let us also remember in our prayers and in our hearts the victims of the tsunami in Asia. The world has rarely seen such massive devastation and loss of life in a natural disaster. I'm proud of the way Georgians have responded to this tragedy by donating to relief efforts.

Georgians are a compassionate and loving people, always ready to help others in need, from our nearest neighbors to strangers on the other side of the globe.

We give freely of our time and our talents and our treasure. That generosity is truly one of our state's greatest assets.

Ladies and gentlemen, I sense a yearning to make this good state great. We Georgians are not content to stand on the achievements of the past, but eager to create a better future for our children, and our children's children.

We want a state wise in its contemplation...just in its actions...and moderate in the reach of government into our lives.

You see, greatness for a state doesn't require some huge monument for all to see. It is not a journey to a particular destination...but a commitment to follow a course of constant and never-ending improvement.

So long as we listen to the people and act with the Wisdom, Justice and Moderation that are the watchwords of our state, our course will be true.

And so long as we have faith in what we can accomplish together -- that course will lead our state to greatness.

Good night, God bless America...and God bless Georgia.

Senator Stephens of the 27th moved that the Joint Session be hereby dissolved.

The motion prevailed, and the Speaker of the House announced the Joint Session dissolved.

Pursuant to the provisions of a previously adopted motion, the Senate stood adjourned until 1:00 p.m. Monday, January 24, 2005.